

Director of Community Engagement Report

Submitted by: Beth Walker

List of the members currently serving on your ministry or leadership team:

The Entire Congregation serves as engagers in the Community

As you look at the goals you had planned for 2021, what were you able to accomplish? Please be as specific as possible.

Focus in the year 2021 has been on building and strengthening our identity as a congregation of the United Church of Christ where, no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome, and where we worship a loving God who calls us to seek a just world for all.

In 2021, our congregation voted to sign on to the Antiracism Statement of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the UCC.

My personal efforts have been focused on working:

Working with the Zaccariah Walker Racial Justice Initiative of the PSEC through which we did the following:

1. Offered two book studies (*400 Souls* and *Who Will Be A Witness*)
2. Engaged in a service of remembrance for Zaccariah Walker, who was lynched by a mob on a Sunday morning in southern Chester County in August 2021
3. Held a Symposium on Racial Justice in October 2021

Serving as Moderator of the Philadelphia Association which is an Association of diverse congregations in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area, working through challenges caused by community and building up the body of Christ through this network of congregations.

Serving as a member of the Conference Consistory of the PSEC, engaging in strategic planning and conference and association support of congregations and ongoing and new ministries. I also worked with the Conference Church Development team on a New Church Start plan.

Serving on the Joint Vision Mission Team (JVMT), now engaged in planning for the preparation for construction of our new building, including 34 residences for previously homeless individuals.

Serving on the UCC Racial Equity Advisory Taskforce as the UCC undertakes an audit focused on racial equity in the national setting.

Serving on the Board of Directors of the United Church of Christ and on the Board of the Cornerstone Fund of the United Church of Christ. In both capacities, I have the opportunity

to advertise the mission of Old First and also support the many varieties of ways that UCC congregations are investing in and building Community.

Serving as a member of the POWER Livefree team along with Barbara Gurley, where we are focusing on police accountability, ending mass incarceration, ending gun violence and humane treatment of immigrants.

How has your ministry's or leadership team's work and goals shifted throughout 2021 (due to COVID or other events)?

Almost everything I have done has been through Zoom except for the Service of Remembrance and a meeting in the San Francisco Bay area, where we visited congregations engaged in new ministries including housing for returning citizens and a church/tree nursery community center.

Where is your group or ministry area stuck? Do you need help in discerning who to ask to join your group or to get more involved?

I give thanks for those who have been maintaining our congregation's Facebook page and Website, two key means of engaging with the wider community. This includes Suzanne Cole, Devan Johnson and Rev. Michael W. Caine.

We will need everyone to help in the clearing out of our CE and Fox buildings in prep for construction. You are also invited to join with me as we engage our sister congregations in dialogue about ways of breaking the cycle of systemic racism in our institutions and organizations.

What do you hope to accomplish in 2022?

Engagement with our neighborhood as we prepare for construction, building and maintaining good will through what will likely be a good bit of inconvenience for our geographic neighbors.

Helping to develop a mission team to consider the uses to which our newly renovated sanctuary can be put, including visioning of a venue for music/dance performances and gatherings of all kinds.

Working with the JVMT to prepare the sanctuary building as temporary office space and for its use for service camps in the future as well as making sure that we have an accessible and welcoming space for all who enter.

What do you anticipate will be different in 2022 (because of COVID? – because of the new building project? -- because of other upcoming changes)? Do you anticipate any shifts or changes in the needs or focus for your ministry and team?

I welcome anyone who wants to join me in working with the Association, Conference, National Setting and our Interfaith Partners through POWER and POWER Livefree.

What are the ways that the church can support your team in achieving your goals for the upcoming year?

POWER and POWER Livefree are striving to develop a statewide organization so that we can have an impact on full fair funding for our schools, living wages for those who are working, and restorative justice in our communities. You are welcome to join in this work... and if you have family and friends living in other areas of PA, include them in the work.

The UCC, as well as other denominations are looking at a significant demographic shift in pastoral leadership as the number of ministers preparing for and reaching retirement exceeds the number of those seeking ordained ministerial standing. If a call to ministry is in your heart, speak to Pastor Michael or one of the Elders as to how we might help support you in your discernment of this call.

Study and learn about systemic racism and how to address it, transform it, and join where you can, when you can, in seeking a just world for all.